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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some of the factors which affect research on sex discrimination in counseling, and also presents some of the findings of a recent study on this topic. One suggestion made is that while the counselor's role has traditionally been a passive exploration of student options, it would be better for counselors actively to encourage women to seek nontraditional careers. Otherwise, their socialization may prompt them to consider only the most traditional career options. In addition, the author discusses several key issues for future researchers to deal with: (1) to specifiy what is meant by sex discrimination and to achieve some consistency in the use of this term; (2) to research the total process of counseling rather than its component elements; (3) to acquire more information about sex discrimination in personal/social counseling, since research there is even more limited than in career counseling; and (4) to acquire more information on the differential impact of counseling on men and women. (PFS)

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STUDYING SEX DISCRIMINATION IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY*

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The focus of this paper is two-fold: to introduce some of the factors which affect research on sex discrimination in counseling and to present some of the findings of a recent study on this topic.

The study I am referring to was an overview of existing information on sex discrimination in counseling and was completed by my colleagues and myself at the Higher Education Research Institute (Harway, Astin, Suhr & Whiteley, 1976). Before exploring it in detail, I would like to describe some of the research group's working assumptions. For the purposes of the study, we considered sex bias in counseling as any condition under which a client's options are limited by the counselor solely because of gender, including limiting the expression of certain kinds of behavior because they have not traditionally been appropriate for one sex. Sex bias in counseling may be overt: for example, suggesting that a female high school student not enroll in a math class because "women aren't good in math," thereby limiting her later options to enter scientific or professional careers. Or it may be covert: subtle expectations or attitudes that "girls always are" certain stereotypic characteristics.

We did not believe it appropriate to examine, in a vacuum, counselors' behavior in order to determine whether sex discrimination exists. Rather, we felt that the impact of the social system must be taken into account in making a decision about the existence of sex discrimination, for even if

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equal counseling treatment were provided to students independent of sex, one would expect different outcomes. It seems obvious that equal treatment of people with different experiences would merely maintain the difference in opportunities for men and women. Thus, we believe that rather than equal treatment for all, equity for members of each sex will probably require differential treatment by sex. While the counselor's role has traditionally been to explore options with students passively, we would suggest that counselors need to encourage women actively to seek nontraditional careers because their socialization may prompt them to consider only the most traditional. Counselors will have to make special efforts to ensure that young women become all they can be, rather than develop along stereotypic lines. We believe that equity should be achieved by using affirmative action--not by passive approval or disapproval of a student's choice, but by an active affirmative step to enhance the student's options. Moreover, the traditional linkage of stereotyped characteristics with sex, the resultant discrimination, and the contrast with the realities of everyday life (such as child care) generate ambiguity for many women who become uncertain of their sex roles. Thus, the role of the counselor, we believe, involves exploring with the female client this role ambiguity and her options.

While what we have described above represents our conceptualization of sex discrimination in counseling, one of the key issues for researchers in this field is to specify what they mean by sex discrimination and to achieve some consistency in the use of this term. At the present time, no such consistency exists. For example, government Requests for Proposals (RFPs) in this area either request a definition of sex discrimination from the researcher or specify one advocated by their particular agency.

Another major issue for researchers in this area is a methodological one: that of researching the process of counseling rather than its component elements. Most of the research which has been done to date on sex discrimination in counseling has looked at tests, sex of the counselor, counselor training or at some other factor of counseling. Moreover, judgments have been made about the existence of sex discrimination without looking at the social context within which the counseling occurs. The kind of research that is badly needed is that which examines the process of counseling incorporating components of counseling in an interactive fashion. What can be gained by examining the process of counseling? In a process study, it would not be sufficient to examine the relationship between such variables as sex of the counselor and specific outcomes. However, it might be desirable to relate sex of the counselor to such intermediate variables as behavior of the client, feelings elicited in the client and the consequent behavior of the counselor in the face of such client inputs, in addition to the eventual outcome.

For example, some research indicates that female clients remain in therapy longer that male clients. Is that the result of sex discrimination? We cannot tell until we examine the process more closely. Females because of their socialization may be more comfortable with emotional expression and dependency than males. It may also be that counselors differentially foster these behaviors. A process study of the interaction between counselors and clients with sex as a variable might indicate more clearly to what degree females' longevity as clients is a function of their socialization and/or counselors' inputs. Such research techniques as analogue studies or videotapes of actual counseling interactions ought to be analyzed to study sex differences in counseling.

Another related issue which ought to be considered in dealing with sex

discrimination in counseling is the type of counseling being researched. Our overview of available research suggested that there is a great deal more information about sex discrimination in career counseling than in personal/social counseling. Nonetheless, research is scarce in relation to both types of counseling. One result of this sparsity is that findings of sex discrimination in career counseling are frequently being equally applied to personal/social counseling and vice-versa. Moreover, research with psychiatrists and social workers is being generalized to psychologists and conversely. At this point, it is by no means clear whether these generalizations hold. Until more research is available about similarities or differences between the individual concentration areas of counseling or the different types of mental health professionals, generalizations from existing studies must be made with caution.

Finally, our review of research in this area indicated a basic unevenness in the amount of information available. For example, a great deal is known about sex discrimination in tests and interest inventories and the gender make-up of the counseling profession. Very little is available on the differential impact of counseling on men and women. Moreover, we know little about the subtle process in which counselors may maintain sex-typed socialization. Do counselors behave differently with male and female clients? Should they? It may be that differences in treatment should occur but of another kind in order to counteract the restrictions of sex-typed socialization. Thus, some components of counseling are already overly researched (and where sex discrimination has been documented, overdue for change) while there are great gaps in our knowledge about other areas of counseling.

As an example of what we do know about sex discrimination in counseling, I will now try to highlight some of the findings of the study which I have already mentioned.

• While counselors seem to give advice to both sexes equally, females seem to be more affected by the advice they receive than do males (from secondary analyses of the National Longitudinal Study).

• Internal mechanisms such as sex-role perceptions, self -concept and achievement motivation all have important restraining effects on men and women.

• The views and expectations of others influence young women's orientation toward academic endeavors, thus faculty and counselor attitudes are of the utmost importance (Crandall et al., 1964; Brindley, 1971; Entwisle & Greenberger, 1972).

• Men and women differ in self-esteem, with men rating themselves higher on academic achievement-oriented traits and women rating themselves higher on "artistic ability", "cheerfulness," "Understanding of others," "writing ability and "sensitivity to criticism", none of which is particularly achievement directed (Astin et al., 1974).

• Counselors need to work to counteract the overwhelming forces of socialization in broadening the horizons of clients of both sexes.

• As young women are affected by socialization, so are counselors products of their environment. The degree to which their training and role models shape their experience is reflected in their later behavior as counselors. Even if their training is strictly objective, if it does not alert counselors to the stereotypic assumptions they may make, it cannot counteract the counselors' socialization. Conversely, if their training is sex-biased, it may compound the effect.

• 85 percent of counselor educators are men and a greater proportion of women faculty is found at the assistant professor level and below. The proportion of women faculty employed is far smaller than the proportion

earning doctorates in areas appropriate for counselor educators (Haun, 1974).

• While women faculty will not necessarily provide less biased counseling courses, their experience as women, as women counselors, and as women faculty will undoubtedly affect the outlook on professional women which they will communicate to their students. Moreover, they serve as role models. Programs that hire women are more likely to be open to nonstereotypic ideas.

• There are few courses on counseling girls and women: Only 12 programs in a nationwide survey (Pressley, 1974) offer such courses, yet 75 percent of counseling program heads recommend that a course in counseling girls and women be offered.

• Many textbooks used by counselors in their regular course work appear biased. There are frequent errors of omission and commission. There is little discussion of sex differences or sex roles. Test and measurement textbooks usually mention test bias, although not often in great detail (Tittle, McCarthy, & Steckler, 1974). Theory in the texts is based heavily on psychological theory, bringing with it sex bias. Assumptions about women are frequently made without any data. Women's vocational development and concerns are either ignored or treated as trivial corollaries to men's career development.

• Some have suggested that clients and counselors should be matched by sex and/or race. Our review of studies on matching suggested that neither the sex of the counselor nor the client is significantly related to therapeutic outcome or counselor effectiveness (Scher, 1975; Heilbrun, 1971). The same is true of race (Ewing, 1974, among others). Only the experience of the counselor is significantly related to the outcome.

• Counselors and clinicians hold stereotypes that are no different from those of the general population and regardless of sex, they are biased against women entering male fields (Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1974) and against women who are generally non-traditional.

• The area of sex bias in tests and inventories is one which is well documented and work has already begun to revise biased instruments.

• Test manuals, handbooks and catalogs are further sources of sex bias.

• College catalogs are also aimed primarily at men. (Harway, 1977).

• Of the relatively few studies that evaluate the impact of counseling services, none looks at the difference in impact on men and women, although some look at both men and women. Perhaps this in itself reflects the lack of concern for the special counseling needs of women.

• Our examination of the literature on sex discrimination in counseling and guidance services and our original studies indicate a need to develop and use alternative approaches. If counselors are to help all their clients maximize their potential, regardless of sex, those clients must recognize sex-role stereotypes and biases within themselves, and the counselors must recognize their own biases and the biases in guidance theories and materials.

• Strategies which have been developed include group fights to combat sexism such as task forces within individual schools, school districts, and state departments of education and professional associations' commissions. Nonsexist Curricula and Counseling Programs have also been developed as has in-service training for nonsexist counseling.

• Efforts to meet the unique needs of women have resulted in the development and modification of counseling alternatives. For instance, assertion training as a behavioral intervention is offered increasingly in groups for women only.

Feminist psychologists, counselors, and psychiatrists are revising existing theory and practice within established therapies to deal more adequately with the psychological needs of women. They are also creating independent theoretical perspectives on the psychology of women and experimenting with alternative intervention systems in their professional practices. There are three major thrusts in developing a feminist counseling approach: (a) constructing a developmental psychology of women, (b) identifying and analyzing the negative consequences for women of their socialization, and (c) providing alternative formulations for presenting problems and counseling outcomes goals for women clients.

Counseling returning adult women students has led to continuing education programs to assist women in the transition from homemaker to student with minimal complications, and in determining the direction they wish to take.

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